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THE NEGRO MIGRATION OF 1916-1918¹

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

In accordance with its title, this essay is intended to be an interpretation of the recent Negro migration in the United States. Its object is to sift out from the mass of

¹ This dissertation was presented by Henderson H. Donald to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Yale University in candidacy for the degree of Master of Arts, May, 1920. Since then it has been considerably revised and augmented.

In the preparation of this work the following books were used: James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth*, Volume II; F. S. Chapin, *Introduction to the Study of Human Evolution*; H. P. Fairchild, *Immigration*; H. E. Gregory, A. G. Keller, and A. L. Bishop, *Physical and Commercial Geography*; A. G. Keller, *Societal Evolution*; R. F. Hoxie, *Trade Unionism in the United States*; E. J. Scott, *Negro Migration during the War*; W. G. Sumner, *Folkways*; F. J. Warne, *The Immigration Invasion*; C. G. Woodson, *A Century of Negro Migration*.

The following magazine articles were also helpful: Ray S. Baker, "The Negro Goes Forth" (*World's Work*, 34: 314-17, July, 1917); W. E. B. DuBois, "The Migration of Negroes" (*The Crisis*, 14: 63-66, June, 1917); B. M. Edens, "When Labor is Cheap" (*Survey*, 38: 511, September 8, 1917); H. A. Hoyer, "Migration of Colored Workers" (*Survey*, 45: 930, March 26, 1921); G. E. Haynes, "Negroes Move North" (*Survey*, 40: 115-22, May 4, 1917) and "Effect of War Conditions on Negro Labor" (*Academy of Political Science*, 8: 299-312, February, 1919); T. A. Hill, "Why Southern Negroes Don't go South" (*Survey*, 43: 183-85, November 29, 1919); H. W. Horwill, "A Negro Exodus" (*Contemporary Review*, 114: 299-305, September, 1918; *Literary Digest*, 54: 1914, January 23, 1917); "The South Calling Negroes

writings the most salient facts pertaining to this movement and to present them in such a manner as to give a correct impression of it in its entirety. In this regard, however, it is not a mere narration of events, but, as far as possible, a sort of scientific analysis of the facts therein contained. Thus, it aims to treat in a systematic and logical manner the various aspects of the movement, to show the relationship between them, and to try to understand and account for the economic and social forces involved. In pursuance of this it has, therefore, seemed fitting to include in this study a brief survey of migration in general, the origin, nature, and scope of the recent movement, its relation to previous movements, its causes and effects, and some conclusions regarding its meaning and significance.

In the preparation of this essay, moreover, the writer Back; An Exodus in America " (*Living Age*, 295: 57-60, October 6, 1917); "The Negro Migration" (*New Republic*, 7: 213-14, January 1, 1916; *New York Times*, November 12, 1916, 11, 12: 1; September 4, 1917, 3: 6; October 7, 1917, 11, 10: 1; January 21, 1919, 3: 6; June 14, 1919, 3: 6; June 16, 1919, 12: 5; June 11, 1920, 18: 1; December 12, 1921, 14: 1); H. B. Pendleton, "Cotton Pickers in Northern Cities" (*Survey*, 37: 569-71, February 17, 1917); W. O. Scroggs, "Interstate Migration of Negroes" (*Journal of Political Economy*, 25: 1034-43, December, 1917); "The Lure of the North for Negroes" (*Survey*, 38: 27-28, April 7, 1917); "Reasons why Negroes go North" (*Survey*, 38: 226-7, June 2, 1917); "Negro Migration as the South sees It" (*Survey*, 38: 428, August 11, 1917); "Health of the Negro" (*Survey*, 42: 596-7, June 19, 1919); "Negroes in Industry" (*Survey*, 42: 900, September 27, 1919); "A New Migration" (*Survey*, 45: 752, February 26, 1921); F. B. Washington, "The Detroit New Comers' Greeting" (*Survey*, 38: 333-5, July 14, 1917); W. F. White, "The Success of Negro Migration" (*The Crisis*, 19: 112-15, January, 1920); T. J. Woofter, Jr., "The Negro and Industrial Peace" (*Survey*, 45: 420-421, December 17, 1921); J. A. Wright, "Conditions among Negro Migrants in Hartford, Connecticut" (a letter).

The following pamphlets and reports were also valuable: Branson and others, *Migration, Minutes of University Commission on Southern Race Questions*, pp. 48-49, 1917; Bureau of the United States Census, *Negro Population in the United States, 1790-1916*, and *Negroes in the United States*, Bulletin 129: A. Epstein, *The Negro Migrant in Pittsburg*; G. E. Haynes, *Negro New-comers in Detroit, Michigan*; Home Mission Council, *The Negro Migration*; E. K. Jones, *The Negro in Industry, Proceedings of the National Conference of Social Work*, pp. 494-503, June, 1917; United States Department of Labor, *Negro Migration in 1916-17*, and *The Negro at Work during the War and Reconstruction*.

has drawn very freely from the material contained in a report of the United States Department of Labor. Accurately described, this source is rather a compilation of reports based on investigations of this movement during the summer of 1917. These inquiries were authorized by the Secretary of Labor and were supervised by Dr. James H. Dillard, formerly a professor and a dean of the faculty at Tulane University, New Orleans, Louisiana, and, at present, Director of the Jeanes and Slater Funds for Negro education in the South. The actual investigations were made and reported on by the following: Mr. T. J. Woofter, Mr. R. H. Leavell, Mr. T. R. Snavely, Mr. W. T. B. Williams and Professor F. D. Tyson of the University of Pittsburgh.

This essay, however, views this movement as the Negro Migration of 1916-18 instead of the "Negro Migration of 1916-17," as some have termed it. This position is taken on the following grounds: The Negroes were attracted to the North largely through the great demand for labor which had been made a fact by the departure of thousands of aliens to serve their respective countries in the Great War. The Negro migration stream began flowing in the spring of 1916, reached its highest mark in 1917, and, even though much diminished, coursed on through 1918 up to the signing of the armistice. With the occurrence of this event the need for Negro labor became considerably less acute, thus causing a decided dwindling of the movement, but not a sudden stoppage of it. It drifted on, however, but with an ever-decreasing volume. Even during the latter part of the summer of 1919 signs that this movement was still in progress were evident, as Negroes were found moving North, though in very small numbers.

A study of the movement of any group of mankind almost of necessity reverts to the consideration of the relation of man to his environment, both natural and human. In the first place, it is known that man, like the plant or the animal, is greatly influenced by his natural surround-

² A full list of these occurs in the bibliographical section of this essay.

ings. It is the policy of nature to allow an unlimited number of individuals to be born, while at the same time the amount of food and space upon the earth is limited. This results in a perpetual struggle for survival, or existence. In this struggle, through the process of natural selection, the individuals possessing those qualities suitable for life in their environment are allowed to survive and to transmit these favorable qualities to their offspring, whereas those having the less fit traits are weeded out. In a word, the battle is to the strong, the race is to the swift.³ The chances of survival of all organisms, therefore, depend on adaptation or adjustment to external conditions.⁴

Besides adaptation, however, nature also presents to the plant or animal other alternatives whenever any fundamental change occurs in the environment which affects the life of these individuals. These alternatives are death, degeneration, and flight. These have all had their effects upon man as well as upon plants and animals. "It is well known that men die when natural conditions become favorable enough; famines recurrently sweep many from the earth. Again, they degenerate when they are forced to live a life that it is possible to live but only in a miserable way. Some of the lowest tribes of men, like the South African Bushmen, or the Digger Indians, have been forced by stronger tribes to withdraw into the desert and to exist upon a lower plane of life. The physique of such peoples betrays the hardships which they have suffered. Men also flee from an unfavorable environment, thus escaping death or degeneracy, if the way into a more favorable locality lies open to them. Much of migration and colonization comes under this alternative."⁵ This topic is well illustrated by those farms of New England which have been

³ Chapin, F. S., *Introduction to the Study of Human Evolution*, pp. 30-31.

⁴ This law, of course, does not fully operate among men in a highly civilized state of living, for in this state its force is much diminished by various uplift, or counter-selective, agencies.

⁵ Gregory, Keller, and Bishop, *Physical and Commercial Geography*, pt. II, p. 126.

abandoned by their former owners, and have been occupied by immigrants from Europe.⁶

As man is compelled to adapt himself to his natural surroundings in order to survive, so he must do in regard to his human or social environment. This external situation is due to the fact that man lives his life in a group, or a society, composed of numerous individuals like himself. In this society are laws or conventions which are imposed on all by the group, and which all are required to obey.⁷ Often, however, it happens that in various ways the acts of large numbers of the group come into conflict with these laws, and the result is the maladjustment of those who have behaved thus. Society then takes steps to compel these individuals to bring themselves back into harmony with the life of the rest of the group. During this period of compulsion, however, all do not comply with the commands of society, for many avail themselves of the alternative of flight or migration to another place where conditions of life seem more favorable. The numerous historical accounts of men and women leaving their native lands in order to escape discomforts, dissatisfactions, punishment or persecution for various reasons, are examples of this state of affairs.

Migration then is an important element in man's environmental relations. It is the means by which he is enabled to escape the pain of an unfavorable environment and to find the pleasure which might result from adaptation in more favorable surroundings. Through flight or migration man simply adopts the course on which his efforts meet with the least resistance, because, instead of remaining in the unfavorable locality to struggle against the most adverse circumstances, or to run the risk of suffering death or degeneracy, he moves elsewhere, where the obstacles appear to be fewer, and where adaptation seems a matter of easier accomplishment. Now, should this same principle be applied to this specific subject under discussion, it would,

⁶ Gregory, Keller, and Bishop, *Physical and Commercial Geography*, pt. II, p. 126.

⁷ Keller, A. G., *Societal Evolution*, pp. 24-37.

perhaps, be demonstrated that the Negroes, likewise, simply used migration as a means of escaping the intolerable conditions in their home environment and of making their way into another accessible locality, where the chances of winning out in the struggle for existence seemed more certain.

In this view of migration as a means of escape from unfavorable environmental conditions we must distinguish it, however, from those earliest movements of primitive men. These were, perhaps, instinctive and differed little from the movements of animals. They were mere "wanderings"; but they were the necessary forerunners of the more recent movements.⁸ Migration, in its truest sense, is a reasoned movement which arose after man had progressed far enough in the scale of civilization to have a fixed abiding place. It is a definite movement from one place to another. It involves an actual and permanent change of residence. Migration, therefore, occurred only in the most rudimentary form among people in the hunting stage; more developed forms of it occurred among pastoral peoples, when they, for instance, changed their base of operation; but in its most complete form migration occurred only after man had reached the stage of agriculture.

If migration is a reasoned affair, it then follows that for every migration there must be some definable cause. This cause must be a very powerful one, because man is inclined to become attached to the locality in which he finds himself placed. There are formed ties of various kinds which tend to hold him to his home. These are the ties of family, friendly associations, customs and habits of the community, politics, religion, business, property, and superstitious reverence for graves. His life is, therefore, closely bound up with his surroundings, and the changing of it for that of another locality is a matter of serious

⁸ What is said here, and also in the remaining pages of this chapter, are for the most part reproductions of parts of Chapter I of *Immigration*, by H. P. Fairchild. In some cases quotations and paraphrases from this source are also given. The acknowledgment here, however, is once and for all.

concern. Thus, "there is a marked inertia, a resistance to pressure among human beings, and the presumption is that people will stay where they are unless some positive force causes them to move."

Furthermore, the force which operates in causing men to move generally presents one of two aspects, viz., attractive and repellent. "Men are either drawn or driven to break the ties which bind them to their native locality." Again, the causes of migration are classified as positive advantages and satisfactions, and negative discomforts and compulsions. The causes of the repellent or negative type exist in the environment of the locality to which man is already attached. They, therefore, are much more important than the others, because, despite the inducements of another locality which may be opened to him, it is the tendency of man to remain where he is, if he is contented. These forces must produce dissatisfaction with existing conditions in order to induce man to move. The causes of the attractive or positive type, on the other hand, are in a foreign environment, and operate often by stimulating dissatisfactions through comparison. They must, before movement can be induced, show that conditions in the new locality are superior to those in the home environment. "Thus, in almost every case of migration one is justified in looking for some cause of a repellent nature, some dissatisfaction, disability, discontent, hardship, or other disturbing condition;" and, likewise, some positive advantage, satisfaction, prospect of contentment, or other favorable condition. Therefore, it goes almost without saying that the study of this subject of Negro migration will show that these two types of forces or causes were also present in this recent movement.

Again, these repellent or negative conditions which cause men to move may arise in any of the various interests of human life, and may be classified as economic, political, social, and religious. Of these "the economic causes of migration are the earliest and by far the most important.

They arise in connection with man's effort to make his living and concern all interests which are connected with his productive efforts. They are disabilities or handicaps which affect his pursuit of food, clothing and shelter, as well as the less necessary comforts of life. These are vital interests and any dissatisfaction connected with them is of great weight to men."

Inasmuch as the economic causes of migration are primal and most important, and since like causes played such a large part in giving rise to this recent movement, it might be well to pause here to enumerate some of these causes, and to note briefly the nature of the same. In the first place, a migration may occur because of permanent infertility of the soil, harsh climate, or a dearth of natural resources which may perpetually intensify man's struggle for existence. In the next place, it may be due to temporary natural calamities such as drought, famine, flood, extreme seasons and so on. This latter set of causes, as will be seen later on, were prominent factors in the recent Negro movement from the South to the North. Again, people may be forced to move because of serious underdevelopment of the industrial arts which may make living hard by limiting the productive power of the people or by retarding them in the struggle for trade. Finally, migration may be due to overpopulation—a condition in which the population of a country has increased to such a degree that there are too many people in proportion to the supporting power of the environment.

As has just been intimated, the causes of migration are fourfold, namely, economic, political, social, and religious. Because of this it must not be thought, however, that these causes are separate and distinct; but it should be understood that they overlap each other and exist almost always in conjunction. In any migration two or more of them will be found present. For example, it is very difficult to find cases in which social causes alone account for a migration. They often, nevertheless, act as a contributory

factor to a movement. The economic causes are by far the most important and universal; but behind them are frequently other causes. "Political maladjustments often express themselves through economic or social disabilities, religious differences through economic and social limitations, etc." In short, it may be said that the motives of migration may be due to a complication of causes. This may be well illustrated by the study of the recent Negro migration in which it will be found that this movement was occasioned by a number of interacting economic, social, and, to a small extent, political forces.

As there are types of forces or causes giving rise to migration, there are likewise types of migration. These are the following four: invasion, conquest, colonization and immigration. Besides these four main types of movement there are other less important forms which deserve notice. They are of two kinds, namely, forced forms of migration, and internal or intra-state migration of peoples. The former occurs (1) when people are expelled from a country because of non-conformity to the established religion; (2) when they are compelled by actual force to leave one place and go to another, as in the case of the importation of Negroes from Africa to the United States to become slaves; and (3) when people are subjected to banishment from a country as a form of punishment for crime. The internal or intra-state movement is that which is going on all the time in most civilized countries, and which is usually a phenomenon of non-importance; but when it involves large masses of people, moving in certain well-defined directions, with a community of motives and purposes, it becomes of great interest and significance and deserves to be classed with the other great movements of peoples. One good example of this is the westward movement of the people of the United States during the early decades of the past century. Another which might be rightly classed as such is the recent large Negro migration which is under consideration in this essay.

The subject of migration in general is capable of very lengthy treatment, but as this is not our purpose here we shall terminate this discussion at this juncture. In this preliminary survey the aim has been to try to show, though in an exceedingly brief manner, the meaning and significance of migration as a factor in the human struggle for existence; the distinction between migration and the earliest movements of primitive man; the types of forces which figure in any migration; and the various forms in which a migration may occur. This has been done with the further intention of endeavoring to imbue the mind at the outset with the idea that this Negro migration is not very radically different from the past movements of civilized man, and that, like them, it occurred in obedience to certain laws which were operating in the environment of the migrants. If this object can be accomplished, little doubt is entertained that it will do much toward affording a clearer and more comprehensive view of the movement than could be otherwise obtained.